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SUBJECT: BABIL VOTE: EARLY SIGNS OF A DECISIVE DAWA VICTORY

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth Hillas, Team Leader, Babil PRT, Dept of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) In a late February 1 conversation, Babil Governorate Election Office Director Hussein Al-Khalef confirmed that Da'wa had won a decisive victory. Although IHEC has not yet released the initial vote results and the exact distribution of PC seats may take several weeks to determine, according to the GEO Director, it appears certain that Da'wa will dominate the new Provincial Council. Da'wa Chair Abu Ahmed Al-Basri believes that his party may have 15 or more seats on the new 30-seat PC, while his deputy had a slightly lower prediction of 13-14 seats. Even discounting these expectations, Da'wa is well positioned to control the PC and select the new Governor.

12. (C) The GEO Director was unwilling to rank the other parties that appear to have won PC seats, making clear that there were a few "red" challenges still to be resolved that could affect the results. Among these is a determination by the Integrity Commission on Governor Salim Saleh Al-Muslimawi's educational qualifications. The Governor has asserted that he received a High School equivalent degree during his years of exile in Iran. This has been an on-again/off-again dispute within the PC itself, but the Governor has yet to submit the original degree document, according to the GEO Director, and he could still be excluded from taking a seat on the Council. In any event, the ISCI coalition (Shaheed Al-Mihrab) faces a seemingly insurmountable task of stitching together an alliance with other parties in order to hang on to power in Babil. Underscoring ISCI's desperation, the day after the election Governor Al-Muslimawi (ISCI) called the head of the "Civilians"/Communist party to propose an alliance in the new PC, according to a communist PC member. The communists rebuffed the Governor, whom they consider "no longer relevant," notwithstanding Buratha (pro-ISCI) media reports that ISCI has pulled ahead in the Babil vote count.

13. (C) According to the GEO Director, the other parties that fared well in Babil -- not necessarily in rank order, he stressed -- include Tayar Al-Ahrar (Sadrist), ISCI, Iraqi National Slate (led nationally by former PM Ayad Allawi) and former PM Al-Jaffari's Iraqi Reform Trend. Notably absent from this list is former Governor Witwit's independent slate, as well as the Civilians (communists) party. The latter, however, believes that it has won 4-5 seats, doubling their previous representation on the provincial council. Sabah Allawi, provincial leader of the Iraqi National Slate, told the PRT that believes his party took second or third place, which is consistent with the GEO Director's preliminary information.

14. (C) A Communist PC member confirmed that although his party rejected cooperation with ISCI, it was open to negotiations with Da'wa, which he said had transcended its sectarian roots. For his part, Al-Basri claimed that Da'wa had won a significant share of votes in predominantly Sunni areas of North Babil. He also said Da'wa is prepared to govern the province on its own, suggesting that it may not be necessary to form an alliance with any other party. In any event, Al-Basri and other provincial Da'wa leaders have made a consistent effort to develop ties in the last year with the Sadrist Trend and Da'wa is well positioned to forge a partnership with Al-Ahrar in Babil, if necessary.

